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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PESHAWAR 000067

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SUBJECT: A DEBATE ON WAZIRISTAN SECURITY: FRONTIER CORPS VS. PAKISTAN ARMY

REF: ISLAMABAD 498

CLASSIFIED BY: Gautam Rana, Political Officer, U.S. Consulate ,
Department of State.

REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) Two of the Northwest Frontier Province's (NWFP) most experienced journalists covering the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) maintain growing security problems (see refTel) are hampering GOP counter-terrorism efforts in North and South Waziristan. These problems are spilling over into the adjoining settled area of Dera Ismail Khan (DIK) and could spread to other FATA agencies. Both argue the worsening security situation can only be resolved by military action, with one opting for exclusive use of the Frontier Corps (FC) and the other claiming that the regular Army must continue to take the lead. End summary.

Worsening Security

¶2. (C) Rahimullah Yusufzai of the The News and Ismail Khan of the Dawn are two of the most senior correspondents covering the FATA in Pakistan. Both have extensive contacts with the Taliban, tribal leaders and Islamist extremists as well as with GOP government, military and intelligence officials. Yusufzai interviewed Osama Bin Laden in 1998.

¶3. (C) North and South Waziristan evince mounting security problems, according to the journalists. Pro-government tribal elders are regularly assassinated, the Political Agents remain unable to enforce their law enforcement decisions, and the Pakistan Army has not conducted a major operation since Lt. General Hamid Khan assumed command of the 11th Corps in October of 2005. In this vacuum, extremists have gained considerable strength. In South Waziristan alone, Yusufzai asserted former Taliban Commissar Baitullah Masud has 13,000 supporters under his command. While Army officers maintain Baitullah is vital to their plans to maintain the local peace, Yusufzai claims Baitullah continues to support Taliban groups infiltrating into

Afghanistan.

14. (C) FATA security problems have also spilled over into the settled district of DIK, according to the journalists. The security situation in Tank is "very bad," in part because the major tribal groups of South Waziristan have long resided in the region and militants among them are increasingly carrying out targeted assassinations in DIK. Both journalists expect the security environment in DIK to deteriorate and warned similar problems could easily spill over into other FATA agencies.

Army or FC?

15. (C) The two reporters agreed that military action -- followed-up with a long-term focus on economic and political development -- is vital to turn around the situation, but differed on which military organization would be more effective. Yusufzai advocated the exclusive use of the Frontier Corps (FC) in the FATA because its ranks are composed of tribal members under regular Army officers. As a result, the FC knows the customs and the people of the region and is therefore better able to handle the situation. Yusufzai suggested that using the regular Army has, and will continue to, inflame the situation because its Punjabi-dominated ranks are resented by tribal groups. On the other hand, Khan argued the Army is the better choice and should continue to form the main military force, due to its training, resources, and efficiency. The Army is not plagued by cross-cutting tribal loyalties that compromise operational security. Khan noted that, as Pashtuns, the loyalty of FC scouts would first be to their tribes, then as Muslims, and finally as Pakistanis. Just as importantly, the FC has proven to be ineffective against determined militant elements, particularly in the first major counter-terrorism offensive

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launched in the spring of 2003.

Comment

16. (C) Khan and Yusufzai's remarks mirror those of other journalists commenting on the current FATA security situation. However, their solution - more aggressive military action - runs counter to GOP statements emanating from the Governor's House and the 11th Corps Headquarters justifying a lull in major offensives to win over greater civil cooperation. These two journalists could not disagree more with that policy and both call for tough military action before security problems spill over into adjoining regions. END COMMENT.
SPANGLER